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ABSTRACT

One of a series on critical issues in vocational-technical education, this paper applies the National Advisory Council on Vocational Education recommendations concerning urban vocational education to a specific inner city school system, the Durham, North Carolina, Public School System, which is seen as a microcosm of our large urban systems. Issue is taken with the Council's recommendations, and suggestions are made which are considered applicable to other urban systems to further enhance urban vocational education. (HD)

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URBAN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION:

The National Advisory Council's Recommendations And Their Applicability to the Inner City Public School System

By

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ABSTRACT

The National Advisory Council on Vocational Education views urban vocational education as a critical issue. The Council's recommendations concerning urban vocational education are applied to a specific inner city school system. The Durham, North Carolina Public School system is a microcosm of our large urban systems. Issue is taken with the Council's recommendations and suggestions are made which are applicable to other urban systems.

It is a pleasure to be with you in Atlanta and a very special privilege to address this group of EPDA Fellows and University Staff Members. As a former EPDA Fellow at North Carolina State University, I feel an obligation to share with you my experience as a Local Director of Vocational Education in an urban, inner city public school system. Of particular interest is the National Advisory Council's concerns and recommendations on urban Vocational Education and their applicability to a specific urban public school system.

Over the course of the past three years, much attention has been given to the role of Vocational Education in this nation's large cities. The Council of the Great City Schools has addressed this role as well as the 1975 National Leadership Development Seminar for State Directors of Vocational Education. Our National Advisory Counsel on Vocational Education conducted hearings in five major cities in 1974 to determine the validity of the statement that Vocational Education in urban areas was inferior to that of the rural and suburban areas. The major conclusion drawn was that Vocational Education needed improvement in our large cities.

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Many concerns were expressed and many recommendations were made which reflect on all three levels concerned with the delivery system: Federal, State, and Local. It is interesting to reflect these concerns and recommendations to a specific urban, inner city environment and on its delivery system of Vocational Education.

The City of Durham is located in Central North Carolina. It has a population of approximately 100,000 and is served by two school systems. One serves the suburbs and rural areas and the other caters to a completely inner city population. This latter system is a microcosm of our large urban systems. The National Council's report was generated through data obtained in five of our largest cities. However, there are only 56 cities with populations exceeding 250,000 in this country. On the other hand, there are 303 cities with populations ranging from 50,000 to 250,000. Durham is one of these. Many of the characteristics associated with an inner city public school system are exhibited in the Durham City public school system. White Flight appears to be the "in-thing", particularly among the middle class. During the past 10 years, the system has

decreased in enrollment by about 30 percent and the racial composition has reversed from 60 percent white to 76 percent black. The system has 19 schools and is continually faced with closing some of these to meet changing enrollment patterns. The State Department of Public Instruction estimates that this trend will continue and there is a possibility that the system may have to close one of the two large comprehensive high schools currently serving the system. The inner city crime rate is relatively high, venereal disease is a serious problem, drug abuse and addiction is common, and the unemployment rate for black teenagers is relatively high. Approximately 60 percent of the eleventh graders tested last year fell in the lower 30th percentile nationwide in reading and mathematics. With these facts, it is easy to see that the Durham City System has many of the problems of most inner city systems and could benefit from implementation of the National Council's recommendations.

The National Advisory Council suggests that the demand for Vocational Education is greater than now can be met with existing faculty and facilities. Only 14 percent of

high school youth in the five cities studied were offered vocational education. In the city of Durham over 50 percent of high school youth are being served in vocational classes. However, students are not properly screened and vocational teachers rarely have the opportunity to interview students before they are assigned to the class. This often leads teachers to the opinion that their classes are indeed "dumping grounds" for the school's problem set.

The National Council recognizes the need for more and better counseling. In Durham, each high school counselor is assigned the responsibility of helping determine the fate of over 300 youth. The system is fortunate to have an Exemplary, Part D Placement and Follow-up Center which has made tremendous strides in aiding black youth in attaining full and part-time jobs. Such a service in all urban systems could do much in significantly reducing the unemployment rate for this segment of our population. Over 300 youth were placed on jobs during the first five months of this school year in Durham by this placement center.

The National Council suggests that cooperative efforts between educators and business, industry and labor communities

need to be increased. Recommended procedures include advisory committees and a school-business exchange program. There is only one functional advisory committee in the Durham City system - the Local Director's system-wide advisory committee. Program area or craft committees are non-existent. The reason can be attributed to lack of pre-service and in-service for vocational teachers. It is sometimes difficult to convert a tradesman into a teacher - it is extremely difficult to expect him to become a teacher, educator, and P. R. coordinator overnight.

The National Council also suggests that urban vocational education is slow in updating course content and adding courses in new fields. How easy it is to bring recommendations and no solutions. With teacher unions spreading across the country, tenure becoming common-place, and contracts becoming more rigid, it is no longer a simple task to eliminate, modify a curriculum, or add a new curriculum. Our rapidly changing technology is not necessarily the problem. The structure of education itself leads to slow decision making - the dependency on community political, religious, and family groups in conjunction with

the rate of technological change lengthens the cultural lag experienced in an urban schools. It will take the Durham City System almost three years to eliminate a few antiquated programs, retrain teachers and add new programs to meet the needs of today's labor market.

The National Council recommends increased funding for urban vocational education. It recognizes that current funding patterns do not allow for the additional expenditures required for expansion of programs in inner city systems. With over 50 percent of Durham's youth in vocational programs, there appears to be no fiscal problems. However, in reality, State and Federal vocational funding provides for only approximately 50 percent of total vocational expenditures. Local resources and State general education monies provide the other half. This is money which could be used to implement remedial reading and math programs which may be the solution to ill-equipped students in secondary vocational classes. It is time State and Federal legislators investigate current allocation procedures.

The National Council suggests that the image of vocational education is improving. However, in the inner city, where vocational education seemingly is needed most, the image is poor and no solution is in sight. There is a general attitude, especially among blacks, that the status attained in a college parallel curriculum is more superior than that of a vocational curriculum. This attitude is very pronounced in Durham. The city is part of the Research Triangle Park area, where education and research is paid the highest tribute. Four major universities are located within 25 miles of the inner city and about 10 other colleges are in the immediate area. Medical and Law School data commonly dominate the headlines and airways. Parents, students, teachers, and administrators reflect this "white-collar" attitude daily. However, over 80 percent of the jobs available in the area are typical "blue-collar" classifications or require training less than the baccalaureate level. The chairman of the School Board recently took the position that every student leaving the city school system should have a saleable skill. This statement raised many eyebrows of educators and lay-citizens. To improve the image of vocational education in Durham and to help

eliminate the "white-collar" attitude prevalent, a K-12 Career Exploration plan needs to be drawn up, tested, and implemented. In North Carolina, vocational monies cannot be used below the seventh grade level. This suggests further local financing or legislative action.

The National Advisory Council feels there is a lack of adequate programs to provide vocational training for handicapped students. This is especially true in Durham. Much dependency is placed on the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. Is this just another example of Vocational Education being unable to adapt to a need and opening a door for someone else to do the job who is not as well equipped? In Durham, only one teacher aid works with handicapped youth for vocational purposes. Finally, The National Council recommends that support for youth organizations be increased. The bulk of the councils' report deals with skill training. This recommendation is concerned with that other area which we, as vocational educators, so proudly communicate to others - social development. The Durham City Administration has taken the position that vocational youth clubs are an integral part of every vocational program and that every student

should have the opportunity to join one, However, except for FHA, youth club activities are limited and fewer than 20 percent of the vocational students are members. Again, vocational teacher pre-service and in-service has been inadequate. Most trade and industrial teachers are completely unfamiliar with constitutions, Robert's Rules of Order, competitions, and opening and closing ceremonies. However, teacher apathy is only one part of the problem. In the inner city, most youth are unable to pay local, state, and national dues. Fund-raising projects are not supported to the extent of those in rural and suburban areas. If all vocational students are to benefit from social skill development through youth club activities, then state and federal monies should be provided to aid in club membership dues.

As a whole, the National Advisory Council on Vocational Education has identified those common threads running through urban Vocational Education. Their recommendations, if accepted, will do much to improve the inner city delivery system. The following recommendations will further enhance urban Vocational Education.

1. To help improve the image problem now associated with urban Vocational Education, provide a more comprehensive offering that includes vocational curriculum which have "white-collar" overtones and "blue-collar" acceptability. Examples are programs in Electronics, Aerospace, Horticulture and Floriculture.

2. All urban systems should have a placement service which is concerned with minority counseling and job placement.

3. Federal and State teacher education funds should be used to provide workshops on organizing and managing advisory committees for urban vocational teachers.

4. Federal and State vocational monies should be allocated to local systems on the basis of need rather than complex formulas which uniformly distribute monies.

5. Federal and State resources should be considered in providing pre-service and in-service to

vocational teachers needing youth club advisor skills. Consideration should be given to using Federal and State monies for payment of club dues for those students unable to meet this responsibility.

The youth of Durham are being served better than some youth of other inner city systems. Some urban youth are being served better than Durham's. It is a typical inner city system with typical inner city problems. Recommendations are common, solutions are rare. To you EPDA's about to embark as vocational administrators, accept the challenge of the urban system and, I hope, help find those solutions which we in Durham are seeking.

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